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Private Voices Teaching Public Values in the Fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Sarah Orne Jewett

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PRIVATE VOICES TEACHING PUBLIC VALUES IN THE FICTION OF HARRIET
BEECHER STOWE, MARY WILKINS FREEMAN, AND SARAH ORNE JEWETT

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Angela Marta González

December 1998

PRIVATE VOICES TEACHING PUBLIC VALUES IN THE FICTION OF HARRIET
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PRIVATE VOICES TEACHING PUBLIC VALUES

Angela Marta González December 18, 1998 68 Pages

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This thesis re-examines the purpose and value of New England women's local color fiction, asserting that local color functions as the groundwork on which the standards and practices of literary realism are based and as the way that nineteenth-century women writers could promote their domestic ministry. Furthermore, the thesis maintains that Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett utilized literary realism to publicize alternative theologies and progressive communities.

Introduction

A literary movement dominated by women writers, American local color fiction of the nineteenth century captured literary realism's essence by using authenticating details of the regions in which the writers lived. Women's local color fiction also offers models of a more feminized, domesticized fiction, what I call a practice in progressive domesticity or domestic ministry. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930), and Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) each wrote stories, sketches, and novels containing the elements of literary realism associated with local color, but their purpose in writing fiction was twofold: the women wanted to step outside of the domestic sphere and to promote the values of the home. Therefore, these women local colorists used literary realism as a vehicle for promoting their domestic ministry.

This thesis re-examines various works of fiction by these three women writers and re-examines their biographies to argue that women's local color fiction sought not only aesthetic aspirations but social ones as well. By publishing their works and through the content of their stories, these women managed to enter into the public sphere, while propagating the progressive values of the home and the domestic sphere. As a result, women's local color fiction can be understood as more than a minor ripple in the larger tidal force of literary realism. Rather, this fiction should be read as the gravity under the waves.

Josephine Donovan, in her classic study New England Local Color Literature (1983), asserts that realism in women's local color fiction "is drawn in opposition to falsely sentimental, inauthentic female characters (seen in the romance), and to artificial

and unjust restrictions placed upon the female role by society” (11). These local colorists embraced literary realism and used the tenets of the nineteenth-century American literary movement in their own “woman-identified realism” (Donovan’s term) that depicts glimpses into what they want their readers to believe is exemplary of real life. Literary realism is, broadly, representative of life. Typically, realists use the novel to explore ordinary people and situations. Often they utilize particular attention to detail and fully describe location, time, and place, in order to authenticate the stories they present. Furthermore, literary realism deals with the ordinary and values character over plot (Pizer 1966). Local color manages to fulfill the criteria for literary realism while using geographically specific details such as community character or personality and dialect. These women writers found an already existing faction of literary realism, local color, they could make their own, while exposing themselves to mainstream literary and public life. By publishing works that promoted their principles and morals, these women local colorists sent their message outside the home and into the public realm. As women, becoming writers was a challenge simply because of the weighty domestic duties and the social role for which they were responsible. Therefore, Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett faced a tremendous challenge of living in both public and private spheres.

Unlike women Sentimentalist writers who were popular during the nineteenth century, these three women, as well as some of their fellow female local colorists, did not compose fictional stories about heroines whose linear narratives culminate in marriage and end before domestic life ensues. Following in the new practice of literary realism that attempts to disguise its own fictitiousness, local color fiction often features the “home

plot” (in Ann Romines’s words), a sketch of or a glance at simulated real life. However, women’s local color fiction, as a practice in “woman-identified realism,” goes even further to suggest its “realness” by not necessarily ending the story after marriage. Besides, many of the female characters in Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett’s fiction never marry. Therefore, instead of writing linear narratives about courtship and marriage, women local colorists wrote cyclical narratives about people, places, and situations they knew. These women writers knew about family, home, and domestic ritual, and by writing and publishing, they used their realm of knowledge and experience to exist within both the private and public spheres.

How Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett made use of local color fiction will serve as the primary focus of the following chapters. Critics disagree whether these writers chose to write their local color fiction as a literary, aesthetic endeavor or as a social, political one. Richard M. Weaver’s “Realism and the Local Color Interlude” from 1968 suggests that, although the local color movement received harsh criticism for its limited subject and character matter, it should be praised for its refusal to address national political themes (301-2). Other readers, however, appreciate local color fiction not because of its lack of political and social concern and its loyalty to interesting, even eccentric characters but because of its wealth of “national” commentary. Weaver holds a limited view that the woman-identified realism of local color contains no value other than artistic or aesthetic importance. The text of the following chapters argues quite the opposite. These three local colorists use the elements of literary realism including careful character portraiture, meticulously detailed descriptions, and realistic portrayals of ordinary life, to express

crucial issues of real political importance to women writers and readers.

Stowe maintained a natural ability to minister because of her family's historical religious service as ministers and teachers, but she could not work as a professional minister since she was female. Freeman wanted to support herself and a sick aunt early in her writing career, and later she continued to write in order to afford luxuries.

Apparently, she believed that women could support themselves; many of her female characters reflect that same self-sufficiency. Jewett visualized a female utopia, and her community of women in The Country of the Pointed Firs enjoyed the same egalitarianism and comradery she shared with her own personal community of women.

By examining Stowe's Oldtown Folks, select short stories in Freeman's "A New England Nun" and Other Stories, and Sarah Orne Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs, as not only literary works but as literary works with social and political agendas, one may see these women local color writers in a different light. In analyzing these works, an understanding and appreciation should be gained of the power of women's local color fiction that has been marginalized for decades as not quite literary realism and, therefore, not quite important enough to include in the canon. Furthermore, this thesis approaches the fiction of Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett as the writers' efforts to test the boundaries imposed upon them as women and to propound their progressive domesticity, their domestic ministry, in hopes of improving and transforming their society. As a result, the project challenges traditional views of local color and will offer a new way of thinking of this particular movement in American literature.

Chapter 1 Stowe's Domestic Ministry in Oldtown Folks

The first impression Harriet Beecher Stowe's Oldtown Folks (1869) makes on a reader is a strange one. Urged by friends and publishers James T. and Annie Fields to embark on the project, Stowe decided to make Oldtown Folks different from her earlier fiction in various ways. First, she wanted to write the entire novel in her head before physically recording it. Second, she planned to distance herself from her audience unlike most of her previous writing. According to Joan D. Hedrick's biography, Stowe felt that she should not preach directly to her readers (332-33). After digesting the straight social and political didacticism of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), a student of Stowe's fiction might initially consider Oldtown Folks merely a collection of sketches about eccentric characters and New England landscapes as described by an impressionable young boy, fashioned after her husband Calvin's childhood (Hedrick 331-33). One might view Horace Holyoke, the narrator, as an immature voice trying to be heard among all the gossiping and social rambling of characters like the nervous Uncle Eliakim (affectionately, Uncle Fly), the village do-nothing and gossip Sam Lawson, the wicked spinster Miss Asphyxia, and the archetypal matriarch Grandmother Badger and her circle of women. However, Stowe's writing always has an instructive purpose. Rather than a direct ministering to the reader, as in Uncle Tom's Cabin, one sees in Oldtown Folks that the techniques of Stowe's fiction changed over the seventeen years between the two novels and that her approach became

much more subdued. The "lessons," primarily religious ones, in the later novel, although more subtle, are still powerful. Stowe's religious background influences the conflicts and debates about religion and spirituality that surface in her fiction. Because she could not be a public minister herself, she had to propound her religious ideas through her fiction.

Stowe actively worked against creating sentimental literature as Hedrick asserts in her biography. Hedrick points out that Stowe aggressively "gathers up the reader's disdain" for the despicable slave trader Haley in Uncle Tom's Cabin and "turns it back, with a vengeance" when she, as narrator, asks her reader to judge not the ignorant slave trader but evaluate his or her own education and enlightenment on the subject of slavery (216). She asserts that God's judgment will prove who the true villain is. Hedrick then explains that readers who assume Stowe is a sentimental writer will wonder at "the highly refined and pointed anger that charges Stowe's narrative, particularly in the first section where her focus is on the Fugitive Slave Law" (216-17). This "highly effective medium that combined literary realism, political satire, and sermoniac power" (217) established the impact of Stowe's literary work and paved the way for other women writers who sought to write not sentimental, but politically and socially-charged fiction after her, and thus Oldtown Folks inspired local writers throughout the nineteenth century.

Tompkins defends Stowe in Sensational Designs (1985). Tompkins points out that the male-dominated canon has blinded "even committed feminists" to the "value of a powerful and specifically female novelistic tradition" (123). She asserts that just because many of the women local colorists gained popularity particularly with lower and middle class readers and women these writers' works do not promote "womanly inferiority"

(123). Rather than read Stowe's Oldtown Folks as sentimental, those who choose to read her should view her as a local colorist and a realist who focuses on women's experiences.

One of the forerunners of literary realism and, more specifically, of local color fiction, Stowe used the techniques of literary realism as a ministerial device through which she could propose and assert the religious values of her domestic ministry. Stowe brilliantly combined domesticity, religion, and reform in her fiction beginning with Uncle Tom's Cabin, and this combination continued throughout the rest of her career.

Therefore, Stowe reached a large audience. Hedrick maintains that Stowe's experience as a teacher helped her understand the importance of capturing the audience's attention and "engaging the reader's ear" (134). In reference to Horace's spiritual visions in the novel, for instance, Stowe told James R. Osgood, "It is calculated that there are between *four & five million* of *spiritualists* in this country—and I want to get their ear—Purposely I inserted that element into the story—not only because it actually *was* there, but because I wanted to get the ear & attention of so many who are of that way of thinking and feeling" (qtd. in Hedrick 346). Stowe wants to sell her books and her ministry, and she decides to use elements of literary realism based on reality (her husband's childhood) to make her ministry, disguised in fiction, real.

Stowe's domestic ministry is vocalized through Horace in his "objective" narration. However, Oldtown Folks is not just a diary for Horace, for the novel is a study of a particular region and of a particular group of people whom Stowe constructed to reflect universal emotions and experiences, even though some of the characters are a bit unique in personality.

of a particular region and of a particular group of people whom Stowe constructed to reflect universal emotions and experiences, even though some of the characters are a bit unique in personality.

The way the characters and their experiences are related by Horace in Oldtown Folks, however, make them seem believable, and sometimes real. After all, Horace's (Stowe's) purpose is to impress upon the reader that the novel's content reflects reality. Therefore, a deeper look at the novel reveals that Stowe does more than fictionalize her husband Calvin Stowe's childhood in South Natick, Massachusetts (Hedrick 331-33). Noticing the meticulous detail with which Stowe's self-proclaimed objective narrator describes the landscape and the characters of Oldtown enables Stowe's readers to recognize the novel as a work of literary realism. But understanding Stowe's method of using this "objective" narrator to faithfully describe characters, places, and events in the novel as a means by which she can offer an alternative to the principles of Calvinism gives the reader an opportunity to view the work as not only an example of literary realism, but

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Although born into a family of Calvinist theologians, Harriet Beecher Stowe departed from the hierarchical notions of Calvinism and developed a feminine theology. According to Hedrick in her 1988 article, "'Peaceable Fruits': The Ministry of Harriet Beecher," this new theology emerged from Stowe's disdain of and disappointment with the patriarchal Calvinist religious and social system that emphasized intellectual acceptance of theories with little attention to the practical application of such theories (310). Stowe found that Calvinism offered no assistance to the lay person who struggled with the disappointments of life (310). For example, when someone lost a loved one to death, Calvinist ministers encouraged the grief-stricken to deny their grief and to "improve the affliction" by recognizing the death as the will of God. Rather than teach victims of grief

to stunt their grieving process, Stowe advised them to participate in grief and then accept the loss as an inevitable, yet necessary work of providence. Stowe's own infant son suffered terribly before his early death, and she felt she could "never be consoled for it, unless it should appear that this crushing of my own heart might enable me to work out some great good to others" (Stowe qtd. in Hedrick 192). Therefore, through fiction, Stowe insists on the truth of one's spiritual experiences rather than the abstractness of theories. In Oldtown Folks, Horace explains his vision of his dead father at the end of "What Shall We Do With Tina?":

For my part, it was through some such experiences as these that I learned that there are truths of the spiritual life which are intuitive, and above logic, which a man must believe because he cannot help it, --just as he believes the facts of his daily experience in the world of matter, though most ingenious and unanswerable treatises have been written to show that there is no proof of its existence. (345)

Throughout the novel, as mentioned, Horace experiences many spiritual visions. He also sees the spirit of Harry and Tina's mother when he having one of his many intimate talks with Harry. Harry himself agrees that one's feelings and perceptions make up one's spiritual well-being. He explains his ideas in "Night Talks":

'After all I have heard and thought on this subject,' said Harry, 'my religious faith is what it always was, --a deep, instinctive certainty, an embrace by the soul of *something* which it could not exist without. . . all my religious views, my religious faith, rest on two ideas,--man's helplessness, and God's helpfulness.' (431)

What Horace suggests in the previous passage lays the foundation of Stowe's

feminine theology. Contrary to the impersonal, yet vengeful nature of the Puritan God, Stowe's God takes care of his children. Horace's faith is "a deep, instinctive certainty" on which his spiritual life depends, and he sees God as the force behind that certainty that provides love, protection, and mercy.

In Horace's description of the Oldtown meeting-house, a funeral service proves to be the most exemplary of the Calvinist formal system that Stowe challenges. Horace explains that the funeral began with a prayer, followed by a procession of relatives and friends, and then was completed by the burial of the dead. All of the activities, Horace relates, were performed in total silence with only the clods of dirt and the spades making a sound (39).

Horace describes another important element of Calvinist funeral practices: the ritual of public "admonition and condolence" performed the Sunday after the funeral of a parish member. In this ceremony, the minister preaches directly to the nearest friends and relatives of the deceased as they stand at their seats. Then the minister expresses how the mortal life is meaningless until one realizes that it is lived in hopeful expectation of Heaven. As Horace explains, this particular ritual is performed and observed with the utmost solemnity even when the choir sings and Uncle Eliakim blurts out his version of a vocal "counter" that reminds Horace of the noises believed to come from a one possessed (56). As the narrator notes, the minister and parishioners participate in religious activities with great seriousness and reverence and in compliance with the strict regulations set forth by Calvinist theory.

On the other hand, life in Cloudland, home of Rossiter Academy, provides a

contrast to the strict, methodical Calvinism still alive in Oldtown. Mr. Avery, the minister at Rossiter Academy where Horace, Harry, and Tina go to secondary school, exemplifies what Stowe points out as the impending progression toward a more practical and feminine theology. In "Our Minister in Cloudland," Horace describes Mr. Avery's preaching as "a striking contrast to the elegant Addisonian essays of Parson Lothrop" that serve as a "vehement address to our intelligent and reasoning powers" (368). Furthermore, Horace observes that Mr. Avery preaches his ideas in the pulpit and practices his ministry in daily life. As a professional minister and teacher, Avery constantly teaches his Academy pupils and acquaintances about God's compassion, mercy, and benevolence. Horace reveals Avery's style of ministering in his funeral ceremony practices, which greatly contrast those of the traditional Calvinist minister in Oldtown:

At every funeral he attended he contrived to see a ground for hope that the departed had found mercy. Even the slightest hints of repentance were magnified in his warm and hopeful mode of presentation. He has been known to suggest to a distracted mother, whose thoughtless boy had been suddenly killed by a fall from a horse, the possibilities of the merciful old couplet, --

Between the saddle and ground,

Mercy was sought, and mercy found. (370)

Stowe speaks through Horace in the above example, for her approach to women suffering from the loss of a child and the concern with the child's salvation serves as the basis for Mr. Avery's approach.

Interestingly, Avery also believed wholeheartedly in the impending millennium

when the world would finally be filled only with saintly beings and all the darkness would be gone. Stowe also shares such a belief as demonstrated in her life. She, like many other religiously concerned Americans of the mid-nineteenth century, responded intensely to William Miller's millennialist preaching (Hedrick 148). He predicted the end of the year 1843 to bring about the Second Coming of Christ; therefore, Stowe urged her husband to join with her in reviving their faith and live the life of suffering owed to Christ (148). Although Hedrick explains that Stowe rejected the notion of mortal perfection, no matter how diligently one strived for it, Stowe strongly believed in "second conversion" of the spirit (149).

Avery's millennialism also provides one of the grounds on which he and Jonathan Rossiter, the head of the academy, argue in the privacy of the campus garden. Although Rossiter and Avery disagree on theological issues, Rossiter does not condone opposition from the students toward Avery's ideas. Rossiter reminds Avery that as successful as the Calvinist theological system has been so far that "no system is anything more than human theory" which contains truth, but not "eternal truth" (371). The two men may debate, but apparently they agree that one must not only view faith as an intellectual assent to God's Word but as an unmistakable and "deep, instinctive certainty." What's important about the discussions between the two men is that they both are willing to accept one another's beliefs as individual choices, encouraged by God because believing itself is voluntary. Community works, then, when individuals respect one another's ideas although some disagreement exists. In contrast, Calvinist society expects all members to think with one mind. Believing in the danger of single-mindedness, if such a way of thinking is even

possible, Stowe offers Rossiter and Avery as examples of men who oversee a successful and stable community (although isolated because it is an educational community) that stimulates individualism. And by teaching the young students the value of thinking for themselves, the larger community could benefit from the education they take back into the outside world with them. Again, Stowe uses a model of domestic ministry in that what is learned “at home” or “at school”—both private places considering the isolation of the academy—can be applied to public life.

Horace further examines the importance of individual ideas when he writes that Mr. Avery's preaching to his congregation of farmers is adaptable, "on the move," and ever progressing. Avery's messages "grow out of new forms of society" even though his congregation is largely made up of people who are not physically involved with the "thousand stimulants which railroads and magazine and newspaper literature cast into our existence" (373). Mr. Avery, therefore, exemplifies in word and deed the new practical and progressive theology Stowe promotes in her domestic ministry. Furthermore, Mr. Avery is a man who can publicly teach his religious views. Stowe, like the female domestic ministers in the novel, cannot teach religious ideas in public, especially if they contradict the teachings of Puritanism. What Mr. Avery does in the pulpit and in the classroom, Stowe does through her fiction through characters like him.

Horace reminds the reader that women have never been "consulted in theology" although they have been addressed and discussed by men (365). Some of Stowe's characters divulge their views whether consulted or not; therefore, they execute Stowe's domestic ministry throughout the story. Women could not be professional ministers like

Mr. Avery unless they skirted the conventions of their time and managed to publish their writing. Since none of the women in the novel write except for Tina and Esther (whose writings the reader never sees), they perform their ministries privately in the home and through the family.

Kathryn Kent explains in “‘Single White Female’: The Sexual Politics of Spinsterhood” that Stowe’s and her sister Catherine E. Beecher’s Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School suggests making motherhood a valued profession that requires education and ambition. Kent points out that the two sisters insist that the “natural” role of women, to reproduce, should be determined an occupation for which they not only need instinct but also training. Therefore, even women who do not or cannot bear children can become “real” mothers. Kent writes, “By making motherhood a profession, they also carve out a space for some women to pursue careers outside bourgeois marriage, but only by making the domestic sphere a model for public mothering” (43). Therefore, the private, domestic sphere provides the model for the public sphere.

Kent’s point that proper mothering requires education and ambition is most effectively illustrated when Miss Asphyxia Smith and her brother Old Crab Smith decide to keep the orphan children Harry and Tina. The children are separated; therefore, Harry is to stay with Old Crab and his wife, while Tina must live with Crab's sister. Miss Asphyxia attempts to create out of Tina a clone of herself--a “working machine” (87). Frustrated and miserable, Tina manages to escape with her brother and the children end up being discovered by the town's great communicator, or gossip, Sam Lawson after the

children have been living in the wilderness and in an old house as escapees from their former slavery. The girl turns herself over to the care of Miss Mehitable Rossiter, eloquently described by Horace as "being a woman of counsel and wisdom." Having "ministerial stock" about her, "she was much resorted to for advice in difficult cases" (168). Miss Mehitable teaches Tina about the benevolence of God when she tucks her into bed the first night of her stay. After reciting her prayers, Tina exclaims her hatred toward Miss Asphyxia; however, Miss Mehitable quickly reminds Tina that if God is to forgive her sins, then she must forgive Miss Asphyxia's trespasses as well. As a result, Tina, once afraid of Miss Asphyxia's God, comes to understand through Miss Mehitable a more compassionate, more feminized God who is loving and merciful. In contrast to Miss Asphyxia's strict religious regime, Miss Mehitable proves the power of love and mercy in her domestic ministry to Tina. Tina says that she used to be afraid of God and reluctant to pray to God at Asphyxia's because of that woman's cold, harsh manner and the distance she kept from personal relationships. Unfortunately, Miss Mehitable seems to spoil Tina, and ultimately Tina makes a poor decision when she marries Ellery Davenport. Tina does make a mistake in marriage; but more importantly, Tina learns from Miss Mehitable to make her own decisions even if they are painful to her. Here, Stowe reveals the effectiveness and the inclusiveness of a feminine, domestic ministry as opposed to a masculine, Calvinist theology.

Tina also ministers in the novel. In a conversation about sin and God's mercy, she explains to a young, doubtful Polly (a servant in Miss Mehitable's home) that no depravity is too deep for God to forgive. The young domestic minister creates a metaphor of a little

bird for Polly to understand. Tina says, "I know I'm nothing but just a poor little silly bird; but he knows it too, and he's taken care of ever so many such little silly people as I am, so that I'm not afraid" (343). She further explains that a bird was shut up in the house a few days before and all the effort that they and Miss Mehitable exerted to let the bird out to safety is nothing compared to the care God takes to bring his creatures to safety.

Deborah Kittery ministers in the novel, and her ministry comes from the private sphere. She does not recognize her own abilities as a minister and she accepts the limitations her Episcopal faith puts on women. However, Horace recognizes Deborah's talent, for he cries during her beautiful prayers and reflects on the teachings she gave him when he was young. Although she does not realize her potential, as Maura E. Shea asserts in "Spinning Toward Salvation: The Ministry of Spinsters in Harriet Beecher Stowe," Deborah's message reaches the children she teaches (303). Like the teachers at Cloudland, Deborah's teachings reach out beyond the domestic sphere as proven in her influence on Horace.

In contrast to the lingering influence of Calvinism, Hedrick argues that Stowe's domestic ministry "was shaped by her experiences in a nineteenth-century women's culture" where women possessed the liberty to "develop their own forms, expressions, rituals, and cosmologies" ("Peaceable" 307-08). Furthermore, Hedrick cites Nancy Cott's point that many nineteenth-century women shared "peer relationships" noted by their egalitarianism as opposed to male relationships where hierarchies typically develop (308). Stowe's ministry grew out of her mutual experiences with other women including child bearing and child rearing. Throughout her life, Stowe maintained female peer

relationships that transcended friendship. Her closeness to other women (both within and outside her family) grew out of mutual experiences in which her friends and she helped one another during childbirth and served as parental care givers and guides for one another's children. Stowe could use fiction to express the intimacy among women who frequently talk to each other, share special occasions, and collaborate in child rearing.

Many of Stowe's female characters in Oldtown Folks enjoy strong bonds with other women. At the Badger household, for instance, Grandmother Badger is the central figure of a network of women who minister a practical, domestic theology to others. All of the women in the novel connect to Grandmother in a familial or a social way. Although Horace characterizes her as an "ardent disciple of the sharpest and severest Calvinism," he notes that she often contradicts herself (307-08). She also is the "most pitiful easy-to-be-entreated old mortal on earth" (308). Grandmother cannot refuse a beggar food or a child his or her wishes if entreated sweetly. She encourages compassion and inclusiveness as exemplified in her willingness to take in the orphan children, Tina and Harry. Also, everyone in Oldtown is welcome in her kitchen despite Aunt Lois's disapproval of some visitors, namely Sam Lawson. Again, Miss Mehitable shares the compassion of Grandmother Badger in her enthusiastic adoption of Tina. She says, "There's no saying . . . You never know what you may find in the odd corners of an old maid's heart." She continues, "There are often unused hoards of maternal affection enough to set up an orphan-asylum . . . A lively child is a godsend, even if she turns the whole house topsy-turvy" (171-72). In the tradition of women helping one another take care of each other's children, of course all of the women in the novel influence the

development of both Tina and Harry and Horace as well.

Later in the novel, after Tina's marriage and her discovery of her husband Ellery Davenport's secret past with Emily Rossiter, Tina decides to adopt Emily's child so that the child might have more opportunities for health and wealth. This exchange may seem strange to a modern reader, but Emily gives up her child into the care of her former lover's wife so that the child will not be fatherless and shamed. Also, Tina does not want Emily's daughter to suffer as a homeless child like she did.

Stowe even reveals the benefits of male adoption of predominantly female traditions in Oldtown Folks in her development of the characters of Sam Lawson, Harry, and Horace. Sam Lawson personifies the image of the town gossip, and as a result he is one of the men in the novel who participates in a female tradition. He enjoys what he considers his purpose in life, and it gives him the chance to spread his ministry. He lives to find stories he can relate to others, and his inclusion in the novel is vital to the reader's understanding of characters and events. Sam provides a different perspective than Horace's. What Horace does not see or experience, Sam does. Sam functions, then, as a sub-narrator of the text. Although Sam does not seem to reflect Stowe's perspective like Horace does, Stowe includes this colorful character to further the values of her ministry.

Although his wife, Hepsy, constantly feuds with him and urges him to work more than talk, he neglects to see the importance of making money when the mortal life is short. Sam owns more critics than his wife, however. Aunt Lois dislikes Sam and becomes angry every time he enters Grandmother's kitchen. Even Horace asks Sam, "But, Sam . . . how does business get along? Haven't you got anything to do but tramp the pastures and

moralize" (436)? Sam answers that he has done some black smithing, but then he continues with his storytelling. As the town gossip, Sam also functions in the novel as one who binds the community members together through storytelling.

Sam thrives on knowing what other people say and do, but he stays true to his own beliefs and takes every opportunity possible to express those ideas. Although his ideas seem confused most of the time, he does voice down-to-earth notions of God's purpose and will, and the role of the human in God's will. He, like the other compassionate souls of the novel, loves everyone and tries not to criticize. Ironically, however, Sam believes the man is the head of the woman in the home. Aunt Lois argues with this idea since "Hepsy earns the most of what that family uses" (449). Sam Lawson might gain sympathy from the reader since he is a likable character for the most part, but sex-discriminating statements can make observers of him more critical of his behavior. Although he says he does not understand what everyone's purpose is in life, he seems to view himself as some sort of herald, gifted in spreading knowledge. Sam discloses his message through talking casually with people because he is not a writer, is uneducated, and is not ordained. The gossip session serves as pulpit for him. Furthermore, Stowe reaffirms the value of Sam's ministry when he has the last word in the novel. He again discusses how "cur'us" the world is and how no one can control what happens since God is in control and should be since "He ain't got nothin' else to do, an' it's his lookout, an' not ourn, what comes of 'em all" (501). Stowe drives a strong message into the reader that God's will should prevail through Sam here and through Horace earlier in the novel. Horace insists that God takes care of everyone who loves him and believes in his will.

Both Sam and Horace leave decision-making up to God, but the practical applications of God's will are up to the feelings of those who honor that will.

Harry and Horace, though not gossips, also follow a typically female tradition of bonding intimately through verbal intercourse. Their frequent talks allow the reader to comprehend the closeness people share when they feel comfortable enough to express themselves freely to others. Horace and Harry discuss their friends, their studies, and their loves. The two young men learn from each other as they share their spiritual experiences and their future goals. Some of the most eloquent writing in this work comes out of these conversations between the Horace and Harry. Their spiritual discussions provide examples of both questions about and discoveries in their religious faith. Both believe that what one experiences spiritually tells more about his or her faith than whether the person trusts in theories developed by Calvinist theologians. Again, Stowe emphasizes the importance of acknowledging God's laws, not people's. As Hedrick explores, Stowe envisioned God not as a distant overseer but as a close and "confidential friend" who listens and sympathizes (Stowe qtd. in "Peaceable" 310). Harry confides in Horace that he believes Christ, the ever-compassionate and even maternal friend, is God; therefore, God is not the Providential master that traditional Calvinism portrays. Furthermore, they each explain how they trust in what cannot be proven. Horace says:

'I have always felt the tyranny of the hard New England logic, and it has kept me from really knowing what to believe about many phenomena of my own mind that are vividly real to me.' (431)

During this dialogue Horace sees the spirit image of Harry and Tina's mother. And Harry

reinforces Horace's beliefs by asserting that he also trusts in what he cannot prove to others and by telling Harry, "[W]e must walk by faith and not by sight" (433). Faith, according to the Christian faith, is believing in what cannot be seen or proven by tangible facts. Therefore, faith develops and grows out of one's spiritual knowledge rather than material knowledge.

Stowe, predisposed to pastoral writing, developed her liturgical skills and publicized her domestic values concurrently. In a letter to her brother George, she wrote, "You see my dear George that I was made for a *preacher*--indeed I can scarcely keep my letters from turning into sermons" (Hedrick 309 emphasis added). Stowe continues:

. . . [I]t is as much my vocation to preach on paper as it is that of my brothers to preach *viva voce*--I write note after note every day full of good advice and am used to saying 'but you must consider' & 'I wish you to remember'--& 'think my dear' . . . (Hedrick 309)

Stowe is famous for promoting her religious and social ideas in her literature, but she does not sermonize in Oldtown Folks as she does in Uncle Tom's Cabin. There are few direct addresses to the reader in which the narrator tells the reader how to think or how to act. Instead, Stowe preaches "on paper" by providing the story of Oldtown Folks with a self-proclaimed objective narrator who offers his (Stowe's) perspectives as reflections of what really happens and of who people really are.

Throughout Oldtown Folks, Stowe asserts the novel as a practice in realistic fiction. The characters reflect the behaviors of "real" people and the events which take place could remind her contemporary readers of actual occurrences. Moreover, in

following the tenets of literary realism, Stowe provides her readers with a seemingly objective portrayal of life as related by her narrator. In the book's preface, Horace declares himself an objective voice to the characters and events contained within Oldtown Folks:

In doing this work, I have tried to make my mind as still and passive as a looking-glass, or a mountain lake, and then to give you *merely the images reflected there*. I desire that you should see the characteristic persons of those times, and hear them talk; and sometimes I have taken an author's liberty of explaining their characters to you, and telling you why they talked and lived as they did.

My studies for this object have been Pre-Raphaelite,--taken from *real characters, real scenes, and real incidents*. And some of those things in the story which may appear most romantic and like fiction are simple renderings and applications of facts. (Stowe 3-4 emphasis added)

Stowe uses her narrator to create an alternative rhetorical strategy (as opposed to her earlier didacticism) which sought to authenticate the events described. She asserts through Horace that the portrayals within the novel are based on reality and not on fantasy. By inserting such a preface, Stowe is both insisting on her "author's liberty" to tell the stories contained in the novel as the narrator sees them and to interpret the depictions in the novel for the reader as she, through Horace, wants her readers to interpret. Stowe gives Horace her voice so that he can express her ministry. In the preface, Stowe's use of the "objective" narrator is her way of disguising her voice as her

narrator's.

Stowe remains within the boundaries of literary realism in her attention to minute details of geographical location and to treatment of character. In her numerous descriptive chapters, Stowe employs Horace as her instrument through which readers visualize and perhaps even recognize the landscapes and the characters portrayed in the novel. Chapter Five introduces readers to the old meetinghouse, and Chapter Thirty-five reveals the picturesque journey to Cloudland, the home of the Rossiter Academy.

The old meetinghouse chapter contains descriptions of the house itself and Oldtown, Horace outlines the basic structure of church services and Oldtown's social structure as well. He explains that the services are highly structured and rigid:

The mixed and motley congregation came in with due decorum during the ringing of the first bell, and waited in their seats the advent of the minister. The tolling of the bell was the signal for him that his audience were ready to receive him, and he started from his house. (55)

Horace describes carefully even the minister's attire which includes a "black silk gown, the spotless bands, the wig and three-cornered hat and black gloves," all combined to add to the reverence paid the minister (55). What is absent from Horace's description is a sense of joy or confidence in the pious citizens as they attend the firmly ritualistic and reverential services. There seems a feeling a nervousness present in the meetings.

Stowe emphasizes the uncomfortableness of the meetinghouse by following its chapter with a description of Grandmother Badger's kitchen. This contrast also draws a line between the public and the private spaces represented by each place. Again, Stowe

offers an alternative to the strictness of the public Calvinist life by describing the intimacy and the relaxed nature of the private kitchen where there are no rituals and no uniforms. In the descriptions of both places, however, Stowe uses the realistic technique of close attention to detail to make the places real to the reader.

In Horace's grandmother's kitchen, family and friends feel welcome and comfortable. The warmth of the firelight from the wood stove and the relaxing glow of the fire create a setting vastly different from the starkness of the meeting-house. The kitchen is a "great, wide, roomy apartment, whose white-sanded floor was always as clean as hands could make it," describes the narrator (57). He then describes to the smallest detail the great fireplace, indicating its importance.

The great fireplace swept quite across another side. There we burned cord-wood, and the fire was built up on architectural principles known to those days. First came an enormous back-log, rolled in with the strength of two men, on top of which was piled a smaller log; and then a fore-stick, of a size which would entitle it to rank as a log in our times, went to make the front foundation of the fire. (57)

Horace goes on for many more sentences describing how the firewood is arranged by his grandfather and how his grandmother rearranges it. Then, he faithfully explains how the fire looks, creating a clear picture of the flames and the smoke curling up from the logs and the fire. Grandmother's kitchen contains her books, work-basket, rocking chair, and Grandfather's old chair as well. However, the room is undoubtedly hers. Horace continues to describe the huge fire and the glow that it sets on every face and every item in the room interspersed with his recollections of the conversations that occur there. As has

already been described, Grandmother's kitchen acts as a welcoming place to everyone where friends and family talk freely. Not only does Grandmother Badger herself serve as a nucleus for the novel, her fireside continually appears as the central location of intimate talks and social gossiping sessions. Around the fireplace in Grandmother's kitchen, the community and the orphan children are accepted into the fold. Most of Sam Lawson's sermonizing occurs at the fireplace as well. Therefore, the fireside, described with strict realistic techniques, serves as a private place where domestic ministers can teach the values that others can take out into the public.

On the way to Cloudland, Horace vividly describes the landscape of the New England mountains. Along the two-day journey, Horace describes mountain peaks whose "cloudy purple heads seemed to stretch and veer around our path like the phantasmagoria of a dream." He also describes that the road would seem to end and hit a great mountain wall, but then the mountain "seemed gracefully to slide aside, and open to us a passage round it" (347). Tina found philosophy in the journey, for she says the mountains reflect life in that "[y]our way would seem all shut up before you, but, if you only had faith and went on, the mountains would move aside for you and let you through" (347). In her most descriptive passages, Stowe continually reveals her purpose in making her fiction seem real to the reader so that one might gain some lesson or some truth applicable to life from her writing. In this way, her fiction is both a practice in literary realism and in domestic ministry.

How else would Stowe spread her message? Even though she is a Stowe, she is a woman without the privileges of her male family members. Her ministry must be divulged

in some other place than the pulpit, but the home proved too stifling for her and she managed to publish her work. Because Stowe does, in fact, use this novel and other writings as a means by which to publicize her domestic ministry, readers must note that Stowe's didactic method varies greatly from the romantic didacticism of a work such as Uncle Tom's Cabin. In Oldtown Folks, Stowe allows her reader more freedom in deciding which religious and social model benefits people most. Instead of describing what systems are possible as in Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe provides concrete examples of domestic, feminine systems at work in Oldtown Folks.

Stowe's agenda or purpose for Oldtown Folks is to prove the power of domestic ministry and the value of it to the public sphere. The young people of the novel carry on the progressive domestic ministries of religious, school, and home teachers. As a result, the tradition of a feminine theology, Stowe's domestic ministry, begins and serves as a model followed in many ways by Freeman and Jewett.

Chapter 2 Female Voices and Female Choices in Mary Wilkins Freeman's Short Fiction

Current students and scholars of American literature often study the impact of women's subversion of patriarchal authority in fiction. Women local colorists managed to publish literature modeled, with subversive undertones, after reality. Few publishers were female, and few male publishers would accept writings that were blatantly feminist. Mary Wilkins Freeman surely was well accustomed to the necessity for covert action considering the precarious position of women writers in the late nineteenth century who knew that "any challenges to the public definition of 'women's place' had to be covert if they wanted to sell" and that these challenges had to be "embedded in texts' structures and accessible only to readers who are predisposed to grasp them" (Harris 48). Besides, according to Perry Westbrook's biography, Freeman claimed that she never felt compelled to write for any other purpose than to support herself and her aunt until she married. After marriage, her earnings provided luxuries she could never afford previously (88). Freeman wanted to earn money for her work, and she wrote her messages of progressive domesticity in works of local color and literary realism. Therefore, Freeman's style of embedding a female need for autonomy and voice is a domestic ministry readers can find in her short fiction texts. Lorne Fienberg writes, "Freeman's women toil for their daily bread, for their dignity and self-esteem, and also for their autonomy as human beings" (483). In studying Freeman's stories, the reader finds women who perpetuate the

historical struggle of women to become vocal and independent, while creating their own places in society.

Like Harriet Beecher Stowe in Oldtown Folks, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman created female characters whose voices might go unnoticed unless the characters assumed positions where others could hear them. While she wrote stories characterized as local color and literary realism, Freeman told literary historian Fred Lewis Pattee, “[I] wrote my little stories about the types I knew, [and] they sold” (Westbrook 85). Like her predecessor Stowe and her contemporary Jewett, Freeman created characters modeled after familiar people and settings. She may have written primarily for money, but her stories, featuring in-depth character portraits and authentic details of her own small section of “a country as vast as the United States” (85), prove another agenda existed under the need for economic stability.

Freeman’s women prove themselves as more than the shrinking violets their New England communities might make of them. These women typically defy social conventions in order to assert their own independence and their own identity. Even those who oppose normalcy covertly, such as Louisa Ellis in “A New England Nun,” send a powerful message to their communities. Therefore, Freeman expresses her own personal ministry or agenda in fiction, through techniques of literary realism no less, so that her characters may carry her message. Furthermore, Freeman’s writing was cited later in sociological articles because of her accuracy in depicting New England life (17). Her efforts toward writing literary realism reinforced by the use of her literature as a sociological source prove her a reliable tale-teller and a successful woman realist. By

using realist techniques such as authenticating details, in-depth characterization, and specific geographical locations, Freeman could offer her characters as representative of New England. Moreover, Freeman's readers can understand her writing to be accurately depicting women's continuing struggle to unbind themselves from patriarchal confinement. Through these tactics of realism, Freeman's women seem real to readers. This realness makes Freeman's ministering voice louder without making it intrusive on the reader. Even though Freeman could only safely utilize covert tactics in her short fiction and particularly in her stories collected in "A New England Nun and Other Stories" (1891), her women use either subtle or blatant words and actions to assert their independence and thus to create their identity.

Louisa Ellis in "A New England Nun" proves herself as a woman who clearly can take care of herself. Although domestic tasks generally assigned to women merit no financial value and little to no recognition for the women who perform them, Louisa devotes her life to such tasks and rejects marriage. Louisa's character teaches that a woman does not need marriage to fulfill her life. Westbrook points out that Louisa rids herself of the *burden* of marriage by releasing Joe Dagget of betrothal so that he could marry Lily Dyer.

Fienberg calls attention to Louisa's observation of the "blue-shirted laborers" who pass by her window and the type of work that the laborers perform. They serve others in their "communal" work. In contrast, Fienberg reveals that Louisa's work is individually motivated and that she is self-employed. He writes, "Louisa has translated the work process into a ritual that manifests her self-mastery of her environment" (485). Obviously,

Louisa possesses mastery over herself in her small domestic space. She may not travel outside of the home to work, but she has no authoritative boss to impress or for whom to toil. By nineteenth-century standards, the entrance of a husband into a woman's life equals the acceptance of a sovereign since married women under social and religious expectations of the feme covert (or married woman) were forced to submit to their husbands. Consequently, when the prospect of marrying returns to Louisa after fifteen years of solitude, she retracts her interest in Joe Dagget.

When Joe arrives, he "[seems] to fill up the whole room," disturbing the order of the house by moving books and knocking Louisa's work-basket onto the floor (Freeman 3-5). The "coarse masculine presence" of Joe in her life would only cause disorder "in the midst of all this delicate harmony" (10). The sections of the story where Joe is present exhibit a sense of disorder. When Joe fills up Louisa's room, Louisa becomes uncomfortable and nervous; typically, she performs her household tasks peacefully in a "soft diurnal commotion" (1). Just before Joe arrives, Louisa nervously takes off her outermost pink and white apron and replaces it with another, hastily hiding away her original apron (3). Even Freeman's narrative voice in the aforementioned paragraph seems rushed in "methodical haste" (3).

Unease characterizes Joe's visits with Louisa especially when she brings up his sick mother's caretaker, Lily Dyer. Later, Louisa discovers Joe's and Lily's affection for one another, which also colors her decision to relieve Joe of his betrothal to her. Interestingly, Louisa quickly rearranges her house in its original order and sweeps the dust her suitor has tracked in all over the floor. Freeman writes that Joe loyally visits Louisa twice a week

though he constantly fears putting “a clumsy foot or hand through the fairy web” that permeates Louisa’s home (6). Joe does, in fact, threaten the delicate “fairy web” of protection Louisa has constructed to shield her domestic space from outside influence. In a romantic or sentimental story, a character might consider spinsterhood a disturbance of the natural order of things. Ironically, Louisa’s potential spinsterhood proves her most fulfilling future. Marriage, then, would ultimately destroy the peaceful, orderly, comfortable solitude Louisa has enjoyed since Joe has been in Australia seeking his fortune. Through her character of Louisa, Freeman ponders what treasures of her life she will lose and what aggravations she will gain if she marries Joe:

There would be a large house to care for; there would be company to entertain; there would be Joe’s rigorous and feeble old mother to wait upon; and it would be contrary to all thrifty village traditions for her to keep more than one servant. Louisa had a little still, and she used to occupy herself pleasantly in summer weather with distilling the sweet and aromatic essences from roses and peppermint and spearmint. By-and-by her still must be laid away. (9)

For a woman who loves domestic endeavors so much that she will sew a seam and tear it for the “simple, mild pleasure which she took in it” to marry and thus leave her beloved home and take on the socially prescribed duty of huswifery would be to deny herself all of her pleasure and all of her independence (9). By allowing Louisa to express her private domestic ministry, Freeman embeds her views--a strategy of subversion. Furthermore, Freeman's use of third-person narration as opposed to first-person shows her efforts to address her readers even less directly than Stowe does in Oldtown Folks. However, the

voice in Freeman's work is no less powerful.

Louisa must choose, then, domestic confinement or social confinement. The former lifestyle brings her joy and peace, for she chooses her domestic space and personalizes this place; the latter option is one of obligation imposed upon her by society. Once Louisa finds out that Joe has another love interest, then Louisa can free herself of her engagement to him not only for her own contentment but for his as well. Although Louisa seeks nonconformity and freedom of single life, she also seeks freedom for Joe Dagget. Her feelings of obligation to marry subside upon realizing his divided affections. And as Freeman writes, "If Louisa Ellis had sold her birthright she did not know it, the taste of the pottage was so delicious, and had been her sole satisfaction for so long" (17). Furthermore, for Louisa, "Serenity and placid narrowness had become to her as the birthright itself" (17).

Issues of sex discrimination and public admonition oppress Betsey Dole, who also lives serenely and placidly, in "A Poetess." Freeman's depictions of artist characters such as Betsey and Candace Whitcomb (discussed later) reveal the writer's views on the stifling and the oppression of female creativity. Freeman knew women artists struggled for recognition and appreciation and fought against scorn and criticism for stepping outside of their prescribed domestic sphere. Because of Betsey's mild acclaim as a poet, the older Mrs. Caxton commissions the young protagonist to write a memorial poem for her dead child. Although Betsey has never received money and has achieved only minor acknowledgment of her talent, she enthusiastically embarks on her commission: "Betsey, in this room, bending over her portfolio, looked like the very genius of gentle, old-

fashioned, sentimental poetry” (146). During her writing process, Betsey has visions of the little boy dressed in petticoats and of him in an angelic white gown with wings. She remembers the times she shared with him when he was alive. After toiling for an entire day, she produces sixteen verses of beautiful, heartfelt remembrances of the young boy with which his mother falls in love.

Once Mrs. Caxton makes copies and distributes the poem she fervently praises, Betsey begins to feel some recognition for her gift. Although she “had never received a cent for her poems” and had never even believed it possible, “[T]he appearance of this last [poem] in such shape was worth more to her than its words represented in as many dollars” (151). However, the minister in the community, himself a *published* poet, remarks that Betsey’s poem lacks any true artistry, and her agreement to print it proves her a woman of no taste. A double standard emerges in Minister Lang’s opinion on Betsey’s success as a poet. Because she is a woman, she cannot exercise her talent or interest in writing, let alone acknowledge or advertise her skills. The minister has enjoyed being published in a magazine, but Betsey cannot enjoy recognition from her friends and her community. Upon learning his opinion through Mrs. Caxton, Betsey’s attitude toward her writing drastically changes, and her health quickly declines.

On her deathbed, she calls Minister Lang to her and shows him the ashes of her former creative endeavors, explaining how she burned her poetry since she found it was worth nothing. Calculating the benefits of notifying the minister she knows how he feels toward her efforts to write, Betsey asks the minister to both ensure that she is buried with the ashes and that he write a funeral poem for her. She says none of her writing was

good, “but I’ve been thinkin’—if you jest write a few—lines about me—afterward—I’ve been thinkin’ that—mebbe my—dyin’ was goin’ to make—a good subject for—poetry, if I never wrote none” (159). Her commission to the minister leaves him feeling confused and sympathetic, even humbled. He says, “I’ll—do the best I can, Miss Dole” (159). Betsey’s final request and its impact on the minister leave her a triumphant woman because she forces him to re-evaluate his critical authority by revealing the pain an artist feels when she cannot acknowledge her own talent.

Women local colorists like Freeman could relate to Betsey Dole’s agony, for they too had to covertly proliferate their domestic ministry. As if publishing were not difficult enough, they had to carefully embed their messages of independence and identity so they could publish their works. Freeman must have been fully aware of the tradition of women writers who wrote during the night and under pseudonyms, and she at least enjoyed the freedom to openly write and publish. Having her work accepted and valued was an entirely different issue. While she knew some public success during her time, her writings were not fully given the critical attention and support they deserved until recent years.

Candace Whitcomb suffers similar sex discrimination compounded by age discrimination in “A Village Singer” because she is removed from her lead soprano position in the church choir, one of only two paid positions in the choir. In the first paragraph, Freeman writes, “The spring had come with a rush during the last few days” (18). The spring (Alma Way, the young new soprano) comes quickly and replaces the old, dead, and infertile Candace. Freeman devotes this story to Candace’s efforts to assert her role and her value as a singer and a wage earner. In contrast to the treatment she receives

from her fellow church members, William Emmons, Candace's suitor and the choir leader, keeps his position without any threat of disposal. He is publicly recognized for his talents despite his old age, for he is an "old musical dignitary of the village, the leader of the choral club and the singing-schools" (20). Furthermore, even he denies Candace's worth because he says her "voice had utterly failed of late," she "sang shockingly, and ought to have sense enough to know it" (20). Again, a woman who oversteps her limits in society should step back lest she be considered acting out of her wits or in poor taste.

Candace does not go quietly, however. She intends, like other Freeman women, to be heard whether her listeners choose to hear her or not. During Alma Way's solos, Candace sits at her home with open windows and belts out, singing as loudly as she can. Of course, the congregation hears the dissonance drowning out Alma's younger, but weaker voice. Various people criticize Candace's outbursts, but when the minister confronts her about her actions, she vehemently argues her case. She reminds him that "Salvation don't hang on anybody's hittin' a high note"; therefore, her so-called friends in the church have no right to expel her from her rightful place as lead soprano (26). Even Alma recognizes how important being a paid musician is to Candace. Freeman adds a little humor to the story when the narrator says that Alma understands that the choir is to Candace what Italy was to Napoleon (30).

Not until Candace is dying can she claim victory over the injustice served her. She calls Alma to her so that the young woman can sing to her, and Candace overtly criticizes Alma's singing. Candace tells her, "You flatted a little on-soul," positing that Alma's voice lacks soul (36). Candace may not have convinced the rest of the town that she

deserves the honor of lead soprano in spite of and perhaps because of her age, but she does win a small victory by passing on to Alma the most important aspect of singing beautifully—soul.

Similarly to Betsey Dole, Candace Whitcomb dies upon avenging her injustices. Freeman's method in these and other stories of creating female characters who die after regaining their dignities reveals not a sentimental, but a pessimistic view of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American society. Though these depictions may be judged melodramatic, they prove Freeman's point: without a strong network of people to support these women in their endeavors, the women, unfortunately, have no long-term success. They cannot truly enjoy their assertion of themselves into the positions they deserve.

Another case of a woman being denied public recognition and being criticized for her assertiveness is Hetty Fifield who makes herself church sexton, a traditionally male position, in "A Church Mouse." Hetty steps outside of her prescribed "place" as a woman, and particularly as an impoverished woman, by insisting she become a paid employee of the church. In one of her many defiant moments, Hetty says, "Men git in a good way many places where they don't belong, an' where they set as awkward as a cow on a hen-roost, jest because they push in ahead of women" (407). She, like other determined Freeman women, even possesses physical qualities that reflect her strong will, and she pushes her way into a place of her choice. With no dainty, submissive side-glances, she walks in straight lines, looking ahead, and moves like "some little animal with the purpose to which it was born strong within it" (411). Furthermore, Hetty asserts that the "village in which she had lived all her life had removed the shelter from her head," and

“she, being penniless, it was beholden to provide her another” (415).

After much deliberation and resistance, Deacon Gale allows Hetty to move into the church. However, he does not look at Hetty as she pleads her case. His body language suggests he doubts her and does not acknowledge her request to be sexton. He challenges her with many questions about her capabilities to serve as sexton because she is an old woman.

Hetty finally wins over the deacon and takes on her new position although she will not be paid as much as the former, male sexton. As sexton, Hetty is both employed by the church and contained by it, but she chooses this containment. Freeman provides her reader with another woman who, like Louisa, finds happiness and fulfillment in creating her own space where she ultimately achieves public recognition and acceptance.

After moving her meager possessions into the corner gallery of the church, congregation members reluctantly accept her presence until the smells of her cooking permeate the building, disrupting services. Until then, the church members do little more than worry over Hetty’s tent in the corner:

When the congregation had assembled, and saw that gaudy tent pitched in the house of the Lord, and the resolute little pilgrim at the door of it, there was a commotion. The farmers and their wives were stirred out of their Sabbath decorum. After the service was over, Hetty, sitting in a pew corner of the gallery, her little face dark and watchful against the flaming background of her quilt, saw the people below gathering in groups, whispering, and looking at her. (414)

Deacon Gale confronts Hetty, but she insists on her right to live in the church because she

is sexton and because she has nowhere else to go. The community's charity of providing her a private place to live has been exhausted by their standards; therefore, the least they can do, according to Hetty, is allow her a little tent and bedstead in her place of employment.

After staying in the church for a few months, the church members begin to appreciate the decorating and the maintenance Hetty provides until the odor of boiling turnips and cabbage annoys them. When the deacon and other selectmen try to evict her and remove her to an old woman's house to take care of the woman, Hetty, "small and trembling and helpless before them, looked vicious" (419). She refuses and locks herself in the church, and Deacon Gale brings his wife to try and talk Hetty into moving. Interestingly, once Mrs. Gale realizes how important living by her means and on her own terms in the church mean to Hetty, the deacon's wife denies her husband's wishes to encourage Hetty to leave. Mrs. Gale and other church women stand behind Hetty's decision to keep her self-established "place," and the deacon's wife encourages Hetty to voice her desire to stay where she is. Hetty says, "If I can jest stay here in the meetin' house, I won't ask for nothin' any better" (424). One of the other women goes even further to suggest Hetty take the little room where the minister hangs his hat; the woman says the minister can have a hook on the entranceway's wall for his hat.

Hetty enjoys not only her self-determined place, for the towns women join in the celebration of her achievement. Although the space she makes hers in the church is small, it is a space she creates. Daniel writes, "Whereas Freeman's enclosure imagery may, at first, tend to focus the reader's attention on previously established stereotypes for

woman's limited places, instead they clearly redefine and redesign for these women their own places that reflect self-definition" (70). In "A Church Mouse," Freeman offers a female protagonist who clearly wants to create a place for herself so that she can have shelter and so that she can have a little space she earns for herself. Women like Hetty, Louisa, Betsey, and Candace want to own their rightful places, not their "proper" places.

As the final, but most explicit female voice in Freeman's fiction, Sarah in "The Revolt of 'Mother'" creates a new place for herself. Sarah wants a new place, but she has been working for this place for years. Sarah's husband, Adoniram, has been promising her a new house, but he constantly argues that they cannot afford a new home. Freeman's most defiant woman, Sarah Penn, determined to make her husband hear her voice, moves her family into the new barn her husband builds in place of the promised house. Freeman suggests that since Sarah is confined by social convention to live and work in the home, then the home should be wherever the woman wants it to be.

Throughout her life, Adoniram has ignored Sarah's needs and wants. She needs and wants a place where her family can stay together but also grow (Cutter 281). For Father, the new barn works as a mark of material and social success, and it is a way to gain more such success. For Mother, on the other hand, the barn symbolizes her husband's neglect and disregard of her desires. A new home, however, means success of the family. Their old home proves too small for their expanding family. Therefore, Mother Sarah functions as a traditional mother in terms of family growth. As a result, the barn becomes a surrogate home, and it replaces a new home because she chooses to make the barn itself the new home for the family while her husband is out of town.

Much like other Freeman women who do not choose their conventional places and create their own, Sarah “redefine[s]” her place (280). However, Cutter argues, “The real focus of the story is Sarah Penn’s struggle to redefine a linguistic frontier which has excluded her as a speaking subject” (280). In terms of the linguistic battle Sarah must overcome, she aggressively screams out to her husband and her unsupportive community that her needs deserve to be acknowledged and her voice should be heard. Sarah realizes that she must learn the language of power and assert her right to speak and to be heard. And men and women with their contrasting world visions cannot reach compromise or agreement unless they allow these two linguistic frontiers to crash into one another, thus to form a “new linguistic frontier” (280). In an attempt to force this new frontier into existence, Sarah defies convention and forces Adoniram to listen to her and accept her as a worthy speaker. Again, a female protagonist seeks as vehicle by which to teach her domestic ministry. Freeman’s Sarah Penn teaches that women’s voices warrant men to listen. Sarah defends herself against those who scrutinize her actions: “I’ve got my own mind an’ my own feet, an’ I’m goin’ to think my own thoughts an’ go my own ways, an’ nobody but the Lord is goin’ to dictate to me unless I’ve a mind to have him” (Freeman 465). Only God can rule Sarah’s mind and actions—rather bold for a farmer’s wife at the turn of the century.

In Freeman's utilization of realistic techniques, particularly her attention to detail, she creates settings that show the geographic traits of New England and characters who reflect the social atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her female protagonists are round, multifaceted, and dynamic. Perhaps how they change and

how they change other characters as a result of how they change (Betsey Dole and Minister Lang, for examples) are more important than what the protagonists do to speak out against patriarchy.

Freeman's women seek independence from patriarchal authority by defining their own places and identity; thereby, they create a "women's culture" which is "socially constructed from within in response to one imposed from without, wherein are discovered both literal and metaphoric 'spaces of one's own'" (Linda K. Kerber qtd. in Mann 34). In creating such a culture, the women may feel victorious over the communities that previously oppressed them. Unfortunately, however, many of these female protagonists who gain the support of their community die before they can enjoy independent life. Those who live often must suffer the alienation their society bestows upon them for defying convention. Although Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett were contemporaries and the former outlived the latter, Freeman's works of domestic ministry are best studied as precursors to Jewett's. It is not until Jewett's work that readers see the culmination of female characters' efforts to end their silence and achieve true independence.

Chapter 3 Women's Voices Unsilenced: Jewett's Inclusive Community in The Country of the Pointed Firs

Sarah Orne Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs celebrates the unique strength of a community primarily inhabited by women, where women's voices are heard above all others. This particular strength is fortified by the unique friendship among the members of the community and the importance of female friendship exemplified by the mother-daughter and friend-friend relationship between the narrator, a summer visitor to Dunnet Landing, and Mrs. Almira Todd, a matriarchal leader and herbalist in the community. Jewett depicts a friendly, trusting, and fascinating community that is, in a sense, *led* by women and characterized by its activities of gossiping and visiting from which most of the men in the novel prefer to exclude themselves, therefore refusing to disarm themselves of their sense of security in isolation. Furthermore, the men refuse to join in on the most empowering activity of the community—verbal intercourse. In The Country of the Pointed Firs, Jewett describes a pleasant and endearing community for those who are accepting of the qualities of Dunnet Landing and an uncomfortable environment for those who refuse to accept the invitations to adopt the ways that enable the community of women to thrive.

Jewett uses the techniques of local color fiction to teach the domestic values that post-Civil War New England had to accept as a result of the absence of men that war and

a disappearing sea industry induced. Why write local color fiction to promote her feminine values? Annie Fields explains in her introduction to Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett that Stowe influenced Jewett's literary vision by enabling Jewett to "see with new eyes" how a writer preserves the history and culture of a place and how a writer can depict "that other class of country people who preserve the best traditions of culture and of manners, from some divine inborn instinct toward what is simplest and best and purest, who know the best because they themselves are of kin to it" (Jewett qtd. in Fields 8). Jewett posits that the slice of life that local color offers readers is not merely a glimpse at life in an isolated area, for the life there shows itself to be an interesting example of a universal life experience. She says, "Human nature is the same the world over, provincial and rustic influences must ever produce much the same effects upon character, and town life will ever have in its gift the spirit of the present, while it may take again from the quiet of the hills and fields and the conservatism of country hearts a gift from the spirit of the past" (8).

In the novel, Jewett fictionalizes the qualities of female friendship which she valued tremendously, as is evident in her personal life. Jewett's family was one of politically and economically powerful men and remarkable, though less celebrated, women. Jewett, her sisters, and cousins remembered her grandmother Abigail Perry with "tenderness," and "undoubtedly [Abigail] influenced the consistently high social tone of two generations of Gilman and Jewett women: their impeccable manners, social ease, and community involvement, and much of their family loyalty and strict courtesy to one another, even in dislike" (Blanchard 13). Certainly, all of the above characteristics apply

to the women in the novel who enjoy the close-knit community of Dunnet Landing.

Jewett carried on a 25-year long "Boston marriage" to Annie Fields, proving that female friendship is the essence of women's communal strength. Their "marriage" was one of the common types of intimate female relationships made official by establishing a "monogamous union based upon female values, in which one's life was spent primarily with another woman, each giving to the other the bulk of her energy and attention" (Faderman 90). Quite common in the nineteenth century, the Boston marriage was usually considered platonic between two women who sought an intimate relationship with one another. Interestingly, these relationships were acceptable and often encouraged because the American society of the 1800s encouraged female friendship. The Boston marriage is characterized by interchangeable roles that include the roles of the child who is yielding and the protector (like a parent) who is assertive (Fryer 617). Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes that "this closed and intimate world was based on a strong mother-daughter relationship" that "played a central role in holding communities . . . together" (61). Examples of such fortifying relationships are the strength of Jewett's novel and the community she creates in The Country of the Pointed Firs. The female or domestic values encouraged in Boston marriages and in communities led by women include tolerance of individual ideas and lifestyles, interest and sharing in one another's daily and extraordinary experiences, and dedication to the good of the community. For Jewett's narrator, even her narrative voice seems to disappear from the novel as she becomes more and more a participant of village life. Similarly, Jewett found herself constantly engaged in activities and social gatherings during her life at 148 Charles Street, where she shared residence

with Fields (Blanchard 279).

In their life together, Jewett and Fields engaged in and enjoyed the most popular pastimes of the characters of the novel, gossiping and visiting. It is important to recognize that gossiping and visiting together in the nineteenth century, particularly in women's circles, are positive and prove an integral part of the bond of female friendship. This type of storytelling, relaying old stories to new and old friends, is a way of connecting to one another, therefore reinforcing the bonds of the members of the community who accept the importance of gossip and visiting. Stowe's Sam Lawson attempts this same sort of unification in Oldtown Folks, but it is not until Jewett's work that readers encounter gossiping that sustains unity in a community.

In the novel, the manners by which women and men communicate with one another and establish friendships differ. The few men present in the novel do not fit in the community as the women do. The men's characteristic outsider status is not caused by the women casting out the men; rather the men isolate themselves. The women of Dunnet Landing welcome the men and try to include them in their activities, but the men view the ways in which the women relate to others as trivial and unadventurous. The men's alienation from the town comes also as a result of the different ways that the men and women communicate. This rift between women and men who live at Dunnet Landing is apparent in Captain Littlepage's storytelling technique and his isolation from the community as well as Elijah Tilley's story of his wife and his comradeship with the other fishermen who isolate themselves from the community. The men's communication methods, in contrast with the way in which Almira Todd, Mrs. Blackett, Susan Fosdick,

and the "Queen's Twin" tell stories, lend to their isolation and their subsequent discomfort within the community. These differences in communication styles and acceptance of the unique community of Dunnet Landing contribute to the difficulties the men of the story have fitting into the community and emphasize the ease by which the women fit into the society.

Jewett does not, however, write about the men of New England to express dislike for them. Many of the men in her own family, particularly the Jewett side, were old sea captains and war veterans who suffered, yet survived, the changing economic and social climate of New England. Paula Blanchard explains in her detailed biography of Jewett's life and work that when the Transatlantic ship industry declined, New England men, including those in Jewett's family, were forced to find new ways to make a living (9-10). Fortunately, Jewett's ancestors enjoyed substantial wealth and managed to continue shipbuilding for intrastate commerce and began to embark on new ways of prospering in a changing community. Blanchard writes that despite the difficulties inevitable when major economic and social changes occur, "there was no social upheaval, and the town managed to retain its serene character" (10). Similarly, in Dunnet Landing the townsfolk experience such changes and though some find adjustment difficult, the community thrives spiritually.

Jewett's narrator learns how to thrive within the Dunnet Landing community as well. As the writer of the stories, the narrator implies objectivity although Stowe's Horace states his "objectivity" outright. However, Jewett's "objective" narrator is an outsider to the community about which she writes despite townspeople's efforts to make her a permanent resident. The narrator of The Country of the Pointed Firs seems more

objective than Horace, for she never gives her name and passes little judgment on people she meets. In this way, readers are pulled into the community with the narrator. This engaging style subtly invites readers into her narrative, which is in stark contrast to didactic writings like Uncle Tom's Cabin and is still more subtle than Oldtown Folks.

Captain Littlepage tells the narrator heroic stories of his past as a lonely seafaring man who enjoyed the adventurous New England life when shipping and sea travel still prevailed in the region. After a towns woman's funeral, Littlepage visits the narrator in the schoolhouse, where she has created a sort of writing room. While visiting with the narrator (an act that not many men do on their own accord in the novel), he eventually relays his experiences of life at sea. Before his storytelling begins, the narrator sits at the teacher's desk in the schoolhouse and Littlepage sits in "a chair by the window" which "gave him the lower place of a scholar" (21). The positioning of Captain Littlepage disturbs the narrator and she suggests he take the "place of honor" offering him his traditional place as the more honorable because of his age and maleness, but he replies with "There's nothing that ranks" thus refusing her offer. In this passage, Captain Littlepage suggests to the the narrator that Dunnet Landing is not a patriarchal society; therefore he rejects a place of honor in such a community. The narrator offers him stature that he refuses. Although he apparently prides himself in his past adventures and attempts some sort of patriarchal esteem for himself by keeping his title of Captain, he denies the full membership within his community that is offered him. The community does address him by "Captain" suggesting the community's acceptance of his need for the title, empty as it is. Mrs. Todd mentions to the narrator that Captain Littlepage is a bit strange

because of his obsession with books and his old seafaring stories. Mrs. Todd's comment about Littlepage confirms the necessity for distrust in the character of Littlepage as a reliable storyteller, recalling to the mind of the reader that his stories reveal his dissatisfaction with the changing culture of the Northeast coast and its declining shipping industry and the "lazy people" and "loafers" with which he must live in this "closed up community" (24-25). He tells of a heroic sea adventure in which he is the only reputable character aboard the ship. Not surprisingly, he saves the expedition all by himself. His narrative style demonstrates his self-centeredness and his isolation, but more importantly his narrative reveals his insistence on the value of a patriarchal past. Though the community is willing to accept him and grant him honor as revealed by the narrator when she offers him the place of honor in the schoolhouse, Captain Littlepage refuses to recognize Dunnet Landing as a community with which he wants to fully participate. His evaluation of the community is that "There's no large-minded way of thinking now: the worst have got to be best and rule everything; we're all turned upside down and going back year by year" (29). However, Captain Littlepage does participate in a masculine practice of shared solitude along with other men in the novel.

Another dissatisfied male in the novel is Elijah Tilley, whose conversation with the narrator reveals a message about him which is somewhat similar to that of Captain Littlepage. Elijah is a fisherman who tells stories about fishing, his fisherman friends, and his wife. The narrator moves toward the house of Elijah Tilley where he is comfortable away from "the forbidding coast" and enters into "a smooth little harbor of friendship" (189).

Elijah laments his lost wife, but he refers to her not as his great love and not as a wonderful person whom he wanted to make happy, but as the woman who kept his house lovely and welcoming when he returned from fishing expeditions. The narrator considers that "a man's house is really but his larger body, and expresses in a way his nature and character" (192). What she hears about Elijah's "larger body" revealing of "his nature and character" indicates that Elijah's house once contained the most radiant object that went away, his wife. He never admits he loved his wife, Sarah. He misses her and hated that she died because she was kind and never fought with him, and because he knew she would always contain herself in the house and wait for him. His wife was the "Angel in the House" and the narrator begins to see her as "a delicate-looking, faded little woman, who leaned upon his rough strength and affectionate heart, who was always watching for his boat out of this very window, and who always opened the door and welcomed him when he came home" (197). The two rooms the narrator sees are the kitchen and the best room. The best room was Elijah's and Sarah's pride and joy, and like Elijah's Sarah, the best room was very lovely and fancy, but without substance. It was only lovely for the purpose it serves as an ornament of the house, not for its character like the kitchen which is useful and comfortable. "Those were her best things, poor dear," says Elijah about the objects in the best room. Sarah was physically an ornament of the house which Elijah sees as a reflection of himself.

In his story about Sarah, the narrator learns nothing about the woman herself. Elijah himself knew nothing about his wife other than her relationship to the home. Elijah isolated Sarah from the community as a household ornament best suited for life within the

home which is his larger body. Besides, woman's "place" in the nineteenth century was in the home, taking care of the home so that her husband would not need to venture elsewhere for fulfillment. "Maintaining domestic bliss was the wife's responsibility," and neglecting that duty "was severe," writes Susan Garland Mann (38). Freeman's Louisa Ellis stays in her house as well, but she does this for herself not her prospective husband. Louisa wants to avoid the aggravating duties that accompany marriage. This marital example is exactly what Louisa expects and she refuses to subject herself to it. The way Elijah separated his wife from the rest of the community by keeping her at home waiting for him when he was gone not only isolated her from the community, but he isolated himself also. Elijah included Sarah in his self-inflicted isolation from the community that welcomed him and his wife. When the narrator returns to Almira, Almira's opinion of Elijah becomes apparent. She finds him to be self-centered and lonely for Sarah Tilley only because of his loss of precious wife who was nothing more than chattel decorating the home. Almira says, "She was always right there; yes, you knew just where to find her like a plain flower" (296). Almira Todd's evaluation of Elijah's story explains the setup of the best room and the story of Elijah's loss. She recalls that Sarah was always in the house waiting for him to return to the house that was not complete without her. Elijah apparently did not want to be alone in his distance from the activities of Dunnet Landing. The best room is filled with treasures that are not functional, for they serve only aesthetic purposes. Sarah was a fixture of that room fulfilling her role as his wife who stayed beautifully at home as a part of the house of Elijah, incomplete without her loveliness and subservience, which were essential to the proper order of Elijah's home.

When the narrator visits Elijah, she notices, "There were four of these large old men at the Landing, who were the survivors of an *earlier and more vigorous* generation . . . They gave much time to watching one another's boats go out or come in" (186, emphasis added). The "more vigorous generation" refers to the active sea life that used to prevail in Dunnet Landing where the cycle of boats coming in and going out and men loading boats kept the men connected to the solitude of the sea. It was only the coast that kept them separate from the sea and it is the now empty coast that confines them to the land. The narrator describes the fishermen in the novel as "inexpressive" and "self-contained" (187). They do not "waste breath upon any form of trivial gossip" (187), yet they do have a sense of companionship. The shared solitude Captain Littlepage seems a part of applies to the fishermen as well. Nevertheless, it is not like that of the women in the novel who have interactive friendships bonded by daily visits where they tell stories about each other, not hero stories that only disconnect the storyteller from others rather than connecting them to others in the community.

Captain Bowden was the nephew of the eldest member of the group of fishermen, but he was not a member of the group himself. However, he was not all that different from them in their lack of discourse. Two of the men were fathers of families yet their homes were at sea. Hence, the shore of Dunnet Landing is a symbol of the social and communication rift between the women who define the community by inclusion and the men who are on the fringes in an outer sphere of a community, they define by their own exclusion. These men have chosen to be nonparticipants in the community activities, preferring to remain "outside" the society. These characters seem dead in comparison to

the women who are in constant regenerative states changing and growing together while containing their intimacy. In contrast, the men tend to stagnate in the past, lamenting the loss of a more "vigorous generation."

The female relationships in the novel are reflected in their activities and in their stories. Because of the exposure to this unique society that highly values feminine communication and intimacy, the narrator learns to become a new kind of woman through the course of the novel. Although her original intent in staying at Dunnet Landing was to find a place of solitude where she could write, instead she makes many friends and learns to connect herself with a group. Blanchard evaluates the narrator's development as a change from a solitary to a member of the larger human family. The biographer writes, "[T]he visitor's sojourn in the village and her growing friendship with Mrs. Todd are marked by her deepening understanding of each individual's responsibility to the others, and of the fact that living human beings are only one part of the cosmic whole" (281-82). As a result, she learns the value of gossip and visiting, the two most frequent activities of women in the novel. Judith Fryer analyzes the value of discourse among women in "What Goes on in the Ladies' Room?":

Talk is communication, the opposite of a separate consciousness, the substance of women's visits in the nineteenth century—"that endless trooping of women to one another's homes' for social purposes; in order to help one another in times of sickness, sorrow, or trouble; or simply to exchange news and share secrets. (621-22)

According to the second edition of the Wickedary of the English Language by

Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, as quoted in Fryer's article, "gossip" is defined as an experience particularly "applied to a woman's female friends invited to be present at a birth" which suggests that although gossip has also been defined as small or "trivial" talk, the acts of gossiping, gathering together, and sharing experiences prove spiritually significant (622). The spiritual significance is derived from the definition that women join one another when they give birth. This connection is one that is shared by women because only women experience childbirth; therefore, they have a special bond that develops when they share the experience. However, childbirth may not be experienced only by women necessarily. Husbands can be present during childbirth and may take an active role in a woman's pregnancy. Likewise, gossip is not a form of communication and connection applicable only to women who give birth. However, in the novel, the women tend to choose to participate in gossip. The men exclude themselves from the activity.

Furthermore, not all of the women in the novel are mothers. Jewett suggests that the relationships created between and amongst the women of the novel are not exclusive but inclusive. Those who reject of the openness offered by Dunnet Landing are the men like Captain Littlepage and Elijah Tilley and a woman such as Joanna Todd who each prefer isolation and separation from the activities other members of Dunnet Landing choose to enjoy. Those who engage in gossiping and visiting consider participation in talk sessions during visits to one another as a bonding experience necessary to their relationships.

Unlike the men who do not "waste their breath," and Joanna who punishes herself by alienating herself on Shell-heap Island, many women of the novel including the narrator connect to one another in gossip thus establishing the foundation of their contentment in

the community. Fryer reveals that what Jewett, Fields, and other women did in one another's homes was gossip, "which is *not* to say that they engaged in a trivial activity" (622). Jewett, as mentioned earlier, firmly believed in the value of friendship, for she wrote to Miss Sara Norton (Sally) in September 1897, "There is something transfiguring in the best of friendship" (Fields 126).

Perhaps the best example of the gossip and the strength of the women in the novel takes place on the way to and at the Bowden reunion. Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Blackett anxiously awaited the reunion because it promises to be a center of visitation and storytelling. An event such as this "has transfiguring powers, and easily makes friends of those who have been cold-hearted, and gives to those who are dumb their chance to speak, and lends some beauty to the plainest face" (157). The rejuvenating and regenerative spirit of an event such as the Bowden reunion is seen in the transformation of many of the participants in the reunion. Almira Todd and her mother are extremely anxious for the festivities to begin. This excitement reaches the narrator as she is included in the reunion. After the reunion has ended, the relationship between Almira Todd and the narrator is strengthened by the regenerative powers of the reunion revealed as they hold hands the entire journey home. The friendships reborn among the women at the reunion exemplify Jewett's belief expressed in her unpublished manuscript "Outgrown Friends," as recorded in Pryse's article. Jewett writes "there are old friends who are always new friends: who are always responsive, fresh, and interesting" (Pryse 55).

The reunion proved successful to the growth of the narrator as a member of the community and to her comprehension of the community's respect for the matriarch. Mrs.

Todd includes her as much as possible in conversations and soon she "felt like an adopted Bowden" (161). But it is Mrs. Blackett that receives royal treatment at the reunion. At her arrival, she is surrounded by people and followed as if by a court. She is "the centre of a rapidly increasing crowd about the lilac bushes" (162) obviously regarded as the most respected of the Bowden bunch. In contrast, the men at the celebration "looked as serious as if it were town-meeting day" (162). The way that the community attempts to include the men of the community in their activities is demonstrated at the reunion. An older male Bowden is chosen to speak instead of the female "head" of the family, Mrs. Blackett, pointing to the fact that the men are not forced into isolation, but that they choose to be separate from the rest of the community. But the women continue to talk and mingle, learning about people with every story. And Mrs. Todd's excitement rises each moment of the reunion. This community gathering is a place of burgeoning female spirit proven by the narrator's description of Mrs. Todd's disposition:

The excitement of an unexpectedly great occasion was a subtle stimulant to her disposition, and I could see that sometimes when Mrs. Todd had seemed limited and heavily domestic, she had simply grown sluggish for lack of proper surroundings. . . We who were her neighbors were full of gayety, which was but the reflected light from her beaming countenance. (174)

A similar excitement occurs in Mrs. Todd when she decides to take her friend (the narrator) to visit Abby Martin, the "Queen's Twin" and when Mrs. Fosdick, the woman who makes a living out of visiting, visits Mrs. Todd's home.

Visiting is another unifying experience between women that invites them to

engage in the highly regarded act of gossip. The narrator discovers that "To visit . . . [is] the highest of vocations" (Jewett 90):

It is a high vocation on a social level, certainly, implying familiarity, trust, continuity; but also in the sense that it is through the exchange of the details of talk that the women are able to interpret the world, thus weaving the parts into a coherent whole. (Fryer 623)

Mrs. Susan Fosdick is an old friend of Almira Todd's who comes to visit and sends Mrs. Todd and the narrator into a flurry trying to accommodate her. "Everybody wished for [Ms. Fosdick], while few could get her" and upon Mrs. Fosdick's arrival, Mrs. Todd "felt a comfortable sense of distinction in being favored with the company of this eminent person who 'knew just how [to visit]'" (91). Initially the narrator feels left out of the camaraderie between Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick. But after the visitor and the narrator become acquainted, they become "sincere friends" (92). After Mrs. Fosdick's visit, the narrator is quite fond of the professional visitor and understands the value of communication in the form of gossip and storytelling amongst women.

Another instance of visiting that further guides the narrator and the reader to an understanding of the importance of female bonding is the visit to Abby Martin's house. The journey itself proves enlightening for the narrator and refreshing for Mrs. Todd. Long walks together such as the one to Abby's home gave Mrs. Todd and her companion intimate time to talk and strengthen their bond. But the special friendship and sisterhood between Queen Victoria and her "twin" reveals "the most surprising proof of intimacy of all" in that one of the twins has such extreme love and honor for the other that she

dedicates her life to her image (252). Of course, Jewett does not seem to allow Mrs. Todd and the narrator to trust completely Abby Martin's declaration of blood sorority with the Queen, but Mrs. Todd validates Abby's obsession with the Queen by concluding, "Don't it show that for folks that have any fancy in 'em, such beautiful dreams is the real part o' life? But to most folks the common things that happens outside 'em is all in all" (146). In that passage, Mrs. Todd suggests that Abby's life and the way she has chosen to live it is as real as anyone else's not because her relationship to Queen Victoria is based on facts, but because it is based firmly on imagination, which is truthful for the one who imagines. Similar to Stowe's Horace's philosophy that one must believe in what one understands to be true, Abby believes that reality is what one perceives it to be. If she believes in her relationship with the Queen, then whether she can prove a blood relation or not, the sisterhood truly exists for her. Even though Abby Martin is a strange woman who isolates herself and thinks about her "twin" all the time, Mrs. Todd makes a special effort to visit with her because she loves company. Abby does not speak harshly of her community as do Littlepage and Tilley; instead, she welcomes the gossiping and visiting, although she prefers to live in the country alone. Abby's stories are fabricated, but she does seem to have convinced herself that they are real.

When Mrs. Fosdick is visiting, she and Almira Todd tell the story of Joanna Todd, who chose to live as a hermit on Shell-heap Island isolated from the rest of Dunnet Landing. Joanna's story is somber, and Mrs. Todd feels especially protective of Joanna's reputation. Mrs. Fosdick brings up Joanna during conversation, and Mrs. Todd anxiously says, "I never want to hear Joanna laughed about" (103). Joanna Todd proves to be a

strange character who, like the men in Dunnet Landing, chose to isolate herself from the community because she experienced terrible heartbreak. While she was still quite young, Joanna moved to Shell-heap Island and lived the remainder of her life there. The entire community was confused about her decision and, though respectful of the space she requested, tried to re-incorporate her into the society by sailing by and offering her goods to help her survive alone. Despite the eccentricity of her actions, the people of Dunnet Landing were willing to accept her. But Joanna wanted no outside contact from anyone and refused the welcoming community's offers to her to be a part of the community again. Instead, she chose to live alone as a penance for her foolishness in trusting the man she had hoped to marry but who jilted her instead.

The importance of visiting and friendship is reflected in Joanna's story of her self-inflicted alienation when Mrs. Todd wonders how Joanna survived living "without company" (109). She considers companionship just as essential to life and community health as the objects that Mrs. Fosdick considers vital to one's survival such as clothing and yeast for bread and the "piece-bag that no woman can live long without" (109). Joanna died alone, but the citizens of Dunnet Landing always had her on their minds and often on their tongues in numerous gossip sessions. Joanna's story indicates that the people of Dunnet Landing have a close-knit community that strives to welcome all into its realm, although there are some who remain on the outskirts. The very fact that Joanna's story is still alive at the time of the narrator's presence in Dunnet Landing proves that the community always will accept her decisions and continues to make her a part of its daily life, its gossip.

Similarly, the men of Dunnet Landing are a source of discussion for the women, and the narrator is sure to visit with them as well as with the women. On the day that Mrs. Todd and her companion visit Mrs. Blackett, the narrator suggests taking a big boat with the help of Captain Bowden. But Mrs. Todd reminds the narrator that the men in the community have little interest in the women's activities as she quickly explains to her that there is no need for a big boat because they can take a small one with the help of a young Bowden boy since "he'll be down to the herrin' weirs all the time we're there, anyway; we don't want to carry no men folks havin' to be considered every minute an' takin' up all our time" (49-50). Here, Mrs. Todd reiterates that the men in Dunnet Landing do not delight in gossiping and visiting as the women do. In such instances, they choose to stay away from them when the women engage in those activities.

Dunnet Landing contains a culture of open minds and endearing people which embraces even the most odd characters. The citizens are willing to adopt anyone into their society as shown not only in the way that the women try to accept the men, but also in the way that the narrator becomes acclimated and integrated to the society as a sort of adopted daughter to Almira Todd. Unlike any of the relationships between men, the relationship that develops between the two women resembles a monogamous relationship where two women offer one another most of their time and attention, creating a special bond between the women that is not unlike a marriage. Jewett wrote in an unpublished holograph manuscript, "[W]e take the friend for better or worse as the man and woman when they marry" (Pryse 54). The closeness that develops as a result of the narrator's visits to Dunnet Landing leads her to a consciousness in friendship she has never

experienced until she encounters Almira Todd. Early in the novel, Mrs. Todd shares the story of an unrequited love which brings her and her boarder to a rewarding intimacy:

I do not know what herb of the night it was that used to sometimes send out a penetrating odor late in the evening , after the dew had fallen, and the moon was high, and the cool air came up from the sea. Then Mrs. Todd would feel that she must talk to somebody, and I was only too glad to listen. We both fell under the spell, and she either stood outside the window, or made an errand to my sitting-room, and told, it might be very commonplace news of the day, or . . . all that lay deepest in her heart. (9)

While Mrs. Todd tells her story of her first love, the narrator notes that Mrs. Todd stands in the middle of a braided rug encircled by black and grey rings. This image of Mrs. Todd as a "huge sibyl" with a "strange fragrance" blowing in the air resembles that of a goddess or a mythical figure of great importance revealing universal truths to a believer. This image of Mrs. Todd also can represent her maternal qualities to the narrator, who is her student, her follower, her adopted child, and her companion throughout the novel.

Furthermore, the narrator emphasizes the intimacy of her relationship with Almira Todd when she sees the sail of Mrs. Fosdick's boat which, initially, makes the narrator apprehensive of the impending invasion of privacy. She sees their relationship as the "quaint little house" in which she has found "much comfort and unconsciousness as if it were a larger body, or a double shell, in whose simple convolutions Mrs. Todd and [she] had secreted" themselves (86). This association of their relationship as a house differs from Elijah Tilley's equation of his wife and marriage to his house in that his house was his

larger body from which Sarah never left. Her life was a part of his and she had no life outside of him. In contrast, the narrator can leave the Almira Todd's house at any time and she comes and goes throughout the year. Furthermore, the Todd house frequently is visited by other people who seek doses of her healing herbs which suggests that her house is open to everyone, much like the community itself.

Jewett chose to write about female friendships because of her fulfilling personal experiences from close relationships with women. Marjorie Pryse writes in "Archives of Female Friendship and the 'Way' Jewett Wrote" that Jewett wants to make a friend out of her readers:

The "way" she chose to write required her to create fiction out of friendship and to teach her reader, also a potential friend, how to make friends with her characters. It also required her to sustain friendship, which she managed to do . . . for Jewett wished to write fiction that her readers would not outgrow the way she had outgrown most of the books of her childhood. (48)

Jewett allows the reader to enter as a character in the novel through her narrator. Everything in the novel seems real because of Jewett's careful description (through the narrator) of landscape and setting and in-depth portraits of characters. The narrator in The Country of the Pointed Firs is an outsider like the readers, but all hear the same stories and are invited to join in on the activities in which the community engages. The narrator does not judge the characters or the stories they tell. Instead the way the stories are told encourages the listener to evaluate, or one may rely on Almira Todd's judgments provided throughout the story. In this way, the reader becomes a part of Dunnet Landing

as not only an observer but also as a participating member who visits various homes and islands and who listens to the stories that comprise the community. As Pryse points out, "listening is as important as telling" in the novel for both developing intimacy and writing (64). The narrator's story is the novel, where she is a character and the writer. Likewise, the reader is welcomed into the community as the person reading over the shoulder of the narrator. The reader becomes a member of the friendship with Mrs. Todd in addition to a member of the community.

Friendship is the connecting force of the community of Dunnet Landing. Whether the men or Joanna Todd choose to participate in the activities of the community such as visiting and gossiping, they are a part of the society because they are welcome to enter into the relationship amongst the women of the town and whatever their choice, the women will relate stories about them establishing them as essential parts of the whole society. Jewett's emphasis on feminine bonds of friendship is a subject she considered important early in her career and she never outgrew this interest. Her narrator tells the reader that "the process of falling in love at first sight is as final as it is swift in such a case, but the growth of true friendship may be a life-long affair" (2). The narrator's friendship with Almira Todd promises to be a "life-long affair" in which the two women learn from one another and share experiences in a relationship not unlike the "Boston marriages" of the nineteenth century. The plot of the novel may be traced as the "process through which the narrator learns how to turn friendship into a 'life-long affair,'" and then this plot can be linked to the strength of female friendship and the particular characteristics of this type of relationship to reveal the fortitude of the female bonds in comparison to those of the men

in the story (Pryse 64). The women's bonds of friendship provide them with intimacy and connections to the other members of the community. As a result, the women generally feel comfortable in Dunnet Landing participating in all the communal activities, unlike most of the men, who tend to alienate themselves by their refusal to accept the social activities that sustain the intimacy that creates vitality and strength in the community of women.

As domestic ministry, The Country of the Pointed Firs reveals the culmination of the efforts of women's voices to be heard through local color fiction. Jewett's novel is a study in the results of what Stowe's and Freeman's characters can do when they release their messages to listening ears. Stowe provides suggestions to move away from masculine Calvinist traditions, Freeman offers alternatives and sketches lives of individuals who create domestic spaces in opposition to them, Jewett examines and reveals the results of a community that accepts the alternatives and opens its domestic spaces.

Conclusion

The New England women local colorists proved that their fiction functioned not only as a faction of literary realism but as an outgrowth of it and as an inspiration to “regionalist” works that would come later. These women wrote about interesting characters of New England communities and provided both a close look at the individuals who populated the area and a detailed picture of the landscape in which these people lived. The “slice of life” approach of local color gives readers interesting characters who, placed in a picturesque background, show themselves not to be backwards, isolated bumpkins, but fascinating people who try to live as happily as they can in the midst of social and economic change.

Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett offer characters, then, who are seeking new approaches to life because their times are changing, and their lives must change as well. These writers, along with their characters, anticipated the evolving New England society where Calvinism lingered and industry moved out of the sea and onto the land and by the rivers. Another condition of many late nineteenth-century New England towns was the decrease in the male population. While the men were at war and after the war was over, women took control of their communities. With a shortage of men, New England women adjusted to living with fewer men. In Oldtown Folks, Stowe envisioned communities like Cloudland that embraced new ideas and taught tolerance, both tenets of domestic ministry. Although Freeman’s women often faced isolation as a consequence for their progressive domestic ministry, they enjoyed their hard-fought freedom and independence. In Jewett’s novel in particular, men are few, and the women (the novel’s domestic ministers) lead their

society with inclusive communal activities. The three local colorists offered to their contemporary readership and to current readers a new way of living. Is it any wonder that these writers were popular? Sarah Orne Jewett wrote in a letter to Miss Rose Lamb on September 11, 1896:

I think we must know what good work is, before we can do good work of our own, and so I say, study work that the best judges have called good and see *why* it is good; whether it is, in that particular story, the reticence or the bravery of speech, the power of suggestion that is in it, or the absolute clearness and finality of revelation; whether it makes you see a landscape with a live human figure living its life in the foreground. (Fields 117)

Just because these local colorists sold their writings does not lessen their literary artistry. Jewett says that writers and readers should read good works in order to know what works are good and to write well. She sets the standards for good writing in her letter. Good writing equals a work that “expresses bravery of speech, power of suggestion,” and “finality of revelation,” with a strong sense of realism. Stowe, Freeman, and Jewett provide all four of these criteria in their local color fiction. Their popularity during their lives proves that their readers, their communities wanted what these writers gave them.

Furthermore, Holstein explains that Jewett herself wrote to “probe the distinctive character of the region until it reveals the universal” (202). Local color’s “slice of life” approach, in this sense, emerges as the way to prove that the concerns of the diminutive, elderly woman who has determined to make a home in her town’s church building are not isolated; her struggles are ones that other women face. This is the “point at which the

private and idiosyncratic disclose a common inheritance” (Holstein 202). This is the point at which the domestic ministry of private voices expresses its public value.

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